

Marion Council on Aging

Meeting Minutes – May 19, 2021

Present: Harry Norweb (chair), Eric Pierce (treasurer), Caroline Bolick (secretary), Barbara Brown, Madeline Cooke, Dianne Cosman, Kathy Feeney (via zoom), Margaret Gee, Nancy Moore, Paul Naiman, Lenka Nolan (via Skype), Helen Westergard, Karen Gregory

Affiliates: Merry Conway (via Skype), Jeanne Daly, Frank McNamee

Absent Unexcused – Michelle Richardson

Absent Excused – Joe Napoli, George Pina

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM and a quorum was confirmed.

Minutes: report stands as written.

Financial Report: a review of the past two months showed all is good and in control.

Director's Report: K. Gregory: participation numbers are increasing and new programs are being introduced and new faces are appearing. The majority of programs are being held outside and will transition inside in the fall.

An advertisement for an Outreach Worker has been placed. The position has been vacant for about a month and there has been a lot of interest in response to the ad.

The first large scale function was held with more than 70 people attending a tea party and it was a success. There are also outreach meetings with the Police and Fire Department resuming shortly.

Dr Hoffer has volunteered to offer an 'Ask the Doctor' monthly seminar.

A new policy has been written for those interested in using the tent at the COA for a function.

Chair's report: H. Norweb: Report stands as written.

Coastline: M. Gee: no meeting until next month so nothing to report.

Cushing Community Park Project: D. Cosman: All money has been raised for the new walking path, with \$30,000 approved at town meeting to come from the CPA (Community Preservation Act). As well, the FMCOA and the Friends of Marion Recreation will each contribute \$4,500. The select board gave the final approval of the path and now it just needs to be constructed.

The Pavilion project was presented to the Select Board and it got preliminary approval to move forward. Next the fund raising will start. General approval for landscaping was received. There was lots of support from the Select Board.

Friends of the Marion Council on Aging: M. Conway: The FMCOA fiscal year is ending and an invitation to become a member of the FMCOA for the new fiscal year has been sent out via Sippican Surroundings. The big fundraiser this year will be held on Thursday, August 19th 4-7pm at the

Shachoy's at 1 Water St. It's a community effort and there is plenty of volunteer opportunities, so it is hoped that all will help out.

Friendly Conversation Program: N. Moore: the program is still going strong with lots of volunteers. Wonderful bonds have been created between the volunteers and the recipients. J. Daly asked if there would be a roll over from the friendly conversation program to the friendly visitor program? This may happen but first volunteers may need to go through CORI checks.

AARP 8-80 Age Friendly Community Project Report: J. Daly: A new copy editor needed to be found to edit the final domains document as the previous editor could not complete the project. It is hoped that the edited material will be complete in the next few weeks.

All reports listed in Section III A-J of the posted agenda were unanimously accepted.

ONGOING BUSINESS:

Strategic Planning: P. Naiman: H. Norweb and P. Naiman wrote up a proposal to transition the COA board from an appointed and formal board to an informal group of volunteers that will support Karen Gregory in her role as Director of the Marion Council on Aging as well as her staff (see attachment).

Jeanne Daly asked if other full time staffed Council on Aging's had advisory boards? Mattapoisett has no advisory board at all and the Rochester COA has residents that are appointed by the Selectman to run the COA.

M. Conway asked how will the COA request funds to support different programs? The FMCOA's primary goal is to fund different programs for the benefit of the COA and its patrons. If programs fit the Mission and Vision and Values statement of the COA, then FMCOA can help fund. If the request is outside the COA purview, the FMCOA can say no and other areas can be sourced for fund raising.

M. Cooke noted that if Karen Gregory is supportive, it makes sense. K. Gregory noted that this frees up people to volunteer without the bureaucracy of Open Meeting Laws and writing agenda's to be posted in a certain time frame etc. It allows flexibility.

H. Westergard asked about the time frame for this transition. H. Norweb then read the transition proposal that he is going to present to the select board (see attached). If the select board authorizes the plan, then as usual, we have our annual board meeting in June, after which the board will not meet unless under special circumstances. The board will not be active but will still exist with H. Norweb as Chair, E. Pierce as Treasurer and C. Bolick as secretary. The community will be able to see that nothing will change in the running of the COA by K. Gregory and her staff.

The recommendation was unanimously approved by all board members (a super majority) and affiliate board members in attendance at the May meeting. The next step is for H. Norweb to ask the Select Board to approve the recommendation. It will then go to the Mass Attorney General for approval, usually within 90 days. It will be important to note when presenting to the Select Board, that this

recommendation is coming from the COA board directly and not from the town administrator, select board or other external source.

M. Gee recommended creating 4 to 5 talking points to distribute to the board members and affiliate board members so that we are all on the same page if asked. Please send any suggestions for talking points to H. Norweb and P. Naiman.

D. Cosman spoke for all when she said a big thank you to Harry and Paul for all the work they have done in creating this recommendation and the vision they had to suggest this transition.

Nominating/Recruiting: P. Naiman: This is on hold for now in light of the above strategic planning discussion.

NEW BUSINESS:

Next meeting: June 16th at 9AM. This will be our annual board meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 AM

Respectfully submitted,

Caroline Bolick

Council on Aging (COA) Transition Recommendations and Two Proposed Motions

Summary:

The Strategic Planning Committee of the Council on Aging (COA) Advisory Board recommends transitioning from an appointed Advisory Board to informal groups of volunteers. The mission of the appointed Board that was established fifty-one years ago has evolved and the Council on Aging is now in the capable hands of a full time Director and a professional staff, reporting to our Town Administrator. The current and future role of COA volunteers will be more ad hoc and transitory, eliminating the need for the formality and structure of a Town Board.

Background:

The Council on Aging was originally formed in 1970. At that time there were no professional staff, so a volunteer group was appointed by the Select Board to represent and support Marion's senior population. Over subsequent years, the Select Board has made the COA a town department. It is now professionally staffed with employees who today are delivering an increasingly wide array of programs and services, many supported by volunteers.

Through 2016, the Council on Aging had an office in the Town House. Programs were provided in whatever space could be found in the town. Beginning in 2017, COA offices and programming moved into the former VFW Hall, sharing the building with the Marion Recreation Department. The COA now has a 'home'.

As described by the Town By-laws, last revised in 2013, the Council on Aging is not the currently configured advisory committee or even a governing committee, but rather the entity that manages and has the financial responsibility for the COA. With the Council on Aging now a fully staffed Town department, clearly, these By-laws contradict the current status of the Advisory Board and need to be updated or eliminated.

Over the past four years, the Advisory Board has become steadily more decentralized, spinning off "working groups" and subcommittees. Although these teams report to the Advisory Board, they work more closely with, and take direction from the COA Director and staff. In some cases, they work jointly with the Friends of Marion Council on Aging (FMCOA). An example would be the AARP Age Friendly Community Initiative Project. In other cases, they expand beyond the mission of the COA. An example would be the Cushing Community Center Park Project.

Amplifying on the two examples just cited:

- The Cushing Community Park Project has outgrown the mission of the COA. Already an ad hoc subcommittee largely composed of volunteers who are not COA Advisory Board members, it more properly should become a Town ad hoc committee reporting directly to the Town Administrator or his designated representative.

- The AARP Age-Friendly Community Initiative has evolved into a shared initiative of the COA and FMCOA. The work product of the committee, which is nearing completion, will be an action plan spanning numerous Town departments, boards and committees. Well beyond the ability or capacity of FMCOA, COA or any other single committee or department to implement, it will be presented to the Master Plan Implementation Committee, after which the subcommittee will be disbanded.

The COA Advisory Board along with its working groups and subcommittees have no Town-level decision-making authority, but nevertheless currently fall under the Open Meeting Law and other regulatory requirements. Quite frankly, this administrative overhead has diminished COA volunteer participation without any corresponding public benefit.

Recommendations:

The Strategic Planning Committee recommends the following changes to better serve Marion's senior community.

- Transition the current appointed COA Board structure to one that allows the COA Director to match volunteer's interests and expertise to targeted assignments defined by the COA Director. Assignments already undertaken by individual volunteers and informal advisory groups include:
 - Friendly Conversation Program
 - Coastline Elderly Services Liaison
 - Strategic Planning
 - Volunteer Coordination
 - Food Service and Nutrition

This change acknowledges that ideas for new initiatives come from the COA Director and staff, the Town Administrator and other departments, Friends of Marion Council on Aging, the Select Board, volunteers, users of COA services and the general public.

- Supervision of volunteers remain the responsibility of the COA Director and staff. COA volunteers do not and will not have the power to independently enact any program, policy or procedure, nor bind the Town to a commitment without the approval of the COA Director, Town Administrator or the Select Board. This in fact is not a change from how the current COA Advisory Board actually operates today.
- Recognize the Cushing Community Park project as a separate ad hoc subcommittee of volunteers, reporting to the Town Administrator.
- Volunteers should be presented with the Town Committee Handbook by the COA Director and follow the guidelines as outlined.
- Update the Town bylaws by proposing an article for inclusion in the Fall 2021 Town Meeting Warrant (subject to review by Town Counsel) that eliminates the outdated COA By-law and

recognizes that the Council on Aging Director and Staff are the primary conduit to Marion's senior community.

Motion #1

The Council on Aging Advisory Board asks the Select Board to approve these Transition Recommendations.

NOTE:

These recommendations were approved by a unanimous vote of all board members and affiliate board members (14 people) attending the May 19 board meeting. Ahead of the meeting, no absent board or affiliate board member expressed to the board dissent for these recommendations. Those in attendance at the meeting constituted 92% of all board members (13 people) and 83% of all board and affiliate board members (18 people).

Motion #2

The Council on Aging Advisory Board asks that effective July 01, 2021, the Select Board authorize that the Advisory Board be allowed to suspend its regular meetings until such time as the Select Board rescinds the authorization.

NOTE:

The purpose of suspending meetings is to validate to the Select Board, Town Administrator, Marion's older adult population and other interested Marion residents that enacting the Transition Recommendations, culminating in the potential dissolution of the currently defined COA Advisory Board by a vote at the Special Town Meeting this fall, will cause no tangible change in COA operations.

During this trial period, the board will remain intact, with the requisite number of members and an executive committee consisting of the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. If due to state law or other regulatory restriction the Select Board cannot authorize suspending meetings, the Council on Aging Advisory Board will hold brief virtual ones solely for compliance purposes, any other action taken by the board diluting the intended validation process.